

SPIRIT OF THE PIONEER

Newsletter of the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery

www.EugenePioneerCemetery.org

Keeper of Records: Dorothy Brandner's Burial Database

By C.J. Lake



Dorothy Brandner, circa 2010.

For nearly two decades, recently retired volunteer and board member, Dorothy Brandner, has identified the names and personal details of more than 4,200 individuals at rest in the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery.

Brandner's contributions are a model of preservation work that has been recognized by board members, fellow volunteers and the Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries with the Oregon Cultural Trust. The EPCA has a dear friend in Dorothy Brandner.

Dorothy's involvement began in 2007 with a routine dental appointment. While in the chair, she mentioned to Dr. Robert Carmichael, DDS that she'd recently completed a "burial inventory" for the Oak Lawn Cemetery in Corvallis. "Dr. Bob," an EPC Endowment Fund board member, encouraged her to bring her talents to the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery.

What followed was initially an 18-month immersion into archival obituaries, microfilm, and funeral home

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Memorial Day Service

will be held at 11am on Monday, May 25th, 2026 at the Civil War Plot at the cemetery. Organized by Eugene American Legion Post #3, plans for the ceremony include participation of the following: members of the Sons of Union Veterans dressed in Civil War military uniforms, a Three-Volley "Black Powder Salute" in honor of all veterans at rest in the cemetery, Korean Central Church Choir, Eugene-Springfield Fire Department Pipes and Drum Corps and a speaker from the Sons of American Revolution.

Heritage Rose Sale will begin at 10am on Memorial Day prior to the Service.

A Combined Annual Meeting of Eugene Pioneer Cemetery Association and Eugene Pioneer Cemetery Endowment Fund will be held on Saturday, May 9th at 10am at Recreation Hall of Daneland Mobile Home Park at 1199 N. Terry Street in Eugene. Our Annual **Spring Work Party** will be held on Friday, May 22nd, 9am-3pm. And **Flags Honoring Veterans** interred at the cemetery will be placed by veteran volunteers and others on Saturday, May 23rd at 10am. Join us if you would like to lend a hand!

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Charles Lawson Rose

By Elaine Sedlack

A rose frequently found in the Willamette Valley is ‘Charles Lawson,’ in the Hybrid Bourbon class. This class only blooms in the spring. It is a low shrub with a graceful habit, and sumptuous, many-petaled, fragrant flowers in clusters. These have tissue paper thin petals of a complex mauve coloring. The old-fashioned flower form perfectly captures the charm of the Old Garden Roses.

Originally bred in 1853 by Peter Lawson, a Scottish nurseryman and merchant born in Edinburgh, in 1853, and named for his son. Their firm was “P. Lawson & Son.” Charles Lawson served as Lord Provost of Edinburgh from 1862-1865. He was also a grass seed and conifer specialist. The Lawson cypress, *Cupressus lawsoniana*, is named for him.

There are five plants of the rose ‘Charles Lawson’ growing in the Cemetery, found on the following graves: Charles Belshaw– Block 507; Alice Erickson– Block 267; Loretta Moesta– Block 597; Thomas Pollock– Block 331; Lillie Redwine– Block 467.

The plant on the Redwine plot has some minor differences, but apparently there are at least two clonal forms of this rose in existence. These differences can arise when propagation material is taken from different areas of the same plant. Cindy Wise planted a division from the Belshaw plant on former EPCA Board Member Loretta Moesta’s grave. She planted it during her service; a loving tribute to a very effective Cemetery supporter. Loretta was responsible for raising grant money to add water lines to the Cemetery’s irrigation system, thereby greatly easing the burden of the volunteers’ summer watering chores.



The rose on the Pollock grave was discovered when volunteers were pruning a large lilac there. Looking for light, the rose had scrambled up the inside of the lilac! The name

Pollock is of Scottish derivation, so it seems especially fitting to have this rose growing on the family plot. One wonders, how intentional was this planting? The rose was ‘born’ in the same period as the older Pollocks buried here, all in the 1850s. Thomas Pollock, Jr., died in 1909, and the last person was buried here in 1947. Did one of them plant the rose in honor of their Scottish ancestors? There are so many questions to which we will never know the answers!

A Eugene Pioneer Cemetery Track Record

By James Grimm

The family of Jerry Christian were pioneer settlers in Eugene, building one of the first homes in the community. The house is located at 170 East 12th Avenue and is listed on the National Historic Registry. His great grandfather, Daniel Christian III was buried in the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery in 1892 and other family members now rest in the family’s plot.



Jerry Christian, left, with twin brother Gary, at the “Lame Ducks” gathering, June 2025.
Photo: Helen Liu

Jerry became familiar with the cemetery while an undergraduate at the University of Oregon in the 1950s.

He walked through the cemetery on a regular basis for practices at Hayward Field. Jerry was a member of the Duck track team from 1956-1959 under the legendary coach Bill Bowerman. He ran the quarter and half-mile events.



Jerry Christian, right, with family at the Christian house in Eugene, 2024.
Photo: courtesy Jerry Christian

Jerry continued his education and career away from Eugene but returns annually for the NCAA Track and Field Championships and a reunion with former track athletes known as the “Lame Ducks,” which he organizes. As before, Jerry’s track routine includes a stop by the cemetery, but now with his grandchildren. He appreciates the care and oversight provided by the cemetery’s staff, Board of Directors and volunteers, many of whom he has met over the years. Jerry’s twin brother, Gary, donated generously to the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery Endowment Fund, which will further ensure a strong finish at any distance event.

More info about Daniel Christian III on the Self-Guided Tour on the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery website.

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Keeper of Records: Dorothy Brandner's Database

ledgers dating back to 1872. That was just the start! For every grave plot, Dorothy created an electronic entry with full name, birth and death dates, places of origin, cause of death, burial date and historical sources. Her work has resulted in more than a dozen unmarked veteran graves receiving official military markers from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Today the database is searchable on the cemetery website. In 2023 it was the basis for UO visiting professor Christoph Rass' landmark GIS mapping of 26 notable graves and Heritage roses in the cemetery.

"What she has done," said longtime board member Quentin Holmes, "is unlock the history and the mystery of our cemetery. A retired medical records transcriber, Dorothy has blessed us with a genealogist's patience and a historian's curiosity. Without a single relative interred in the cemetery, Brandner has also been a vigilant steward of physical preservation. Her careful notes on broken, leaning or displaced headstones led to an Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission (OCHC) grant funding restoration of grave markers in 2016.



Dorothy Brandner with Bruce Howard, 2017.

Renowned cemetery preservationist Sally Donovan and her husband/assistant Bruce Howard carried out the repairs with in-kind labor from Brandner and other volunteers. All shared a devotion to cemetery care.

When Donovan passed away in 2016, the Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries (OCHC) established the Sally Donovan Legacy Award. In its inaugural year, Loretta Moesta (1964-2020) nominated Dorothy Brandner for this award. And, Brandner became the honor's first recipient.

"Dorothy has been a consistent force behind the sustained growth in our preservation efforts. Her work has been the basis for preserving local and regional history found at the cemetery," remarked Bruce Howard.

One of the more visible projects was the 2013 rehabilitation of the cemetery's only above-ground vault, that of Lillie Belle Ross Smith. Following decades of freeze-thaw weather, the plaster shell had cracked. Brandner and board member George Beebe oversaw the improvements: the vault was drained, dehumidified, hand-scraped, reinforced with fiberglass mesh and sealed with weather-resistant plaster designed to expand and contract with the seasons.

Further, after more than a century, Brandner solved the mystery of the person buried in the above ground crypt. It was not the tragic child of local legend who supposedly died from fever.



Top, Dorothy Brandner and George Beebe; right and above, after the restoration.

"Actually Lillie Belle Ross Smith died at the age of 39 in 1913. Her husband



was a plasterer and the choice of a vault may have been a cost-saving measure. Thanks to Brandner's research and the preservation

efforts of the EPCA, this local legend has been reframed," notes EPCA member C.J. Lake, who utilized the Burials Database for her book *Eugene Pioneers: Voices from the Oregon Frontier*, which will be published in 2026 by Arcadia/The History Press.

Brandner was always on the lookout for markers that were in need of repair. Her personal notes formed the basis for six different marker repair projects that she managed over the years 2011 through 2021. Along the



Dorothy Brandner with Andrew Hruby.

way, Dorothy made time to mentor two Eagle Scout Candidates—Devin Hunt (in 2014) and Andrew Hruby (in 2022).

Brandner was retirement-age back in 2007 when she began volunteering at EPC. Now, nearly two decades later, she is stepping down from her vital role at EPC in order to move on to projects in her home that have waited a long time for attention. The burials database she created remains active and updated, a living archive of Eugene's pioneer past.

History often celebrates grand gestures. Yet Dorothy Brandner's legacy confirms that quiet devotion over years is mighty. She consolidated the data. Her contributions have positioned the EPCA as a vibrant, volunteer-driven organization. And in doing so, Dorothy ensures that Eugene pioneers—and all who are at rest in these 16 acres of open and inviting sacred ground—are remembered.

A big thank you to our Gracious Donors!

Eugene Pioneer Cemetery is on the National Registry of Historic Cemeteries. Our goal is to honor the men and women who are at rest here. The Cemetery is an open and inviting green space in a busy urban setting where visitors can *Cherish the Past, Look to the Future, and Live in the Moment.*

All this is aided by your generous donations. During 2025 the following gave donations—over and beyond annual dues—to Eugene Pioneer Cemetery Association and/or the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery Endowment Fund.

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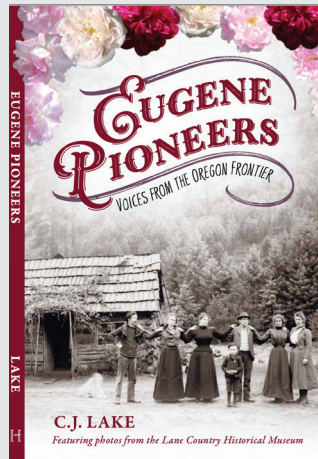
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We are pleased to announce that the newly published *Eugene Pioneers—Voices from the Oregon Frontier*, a book about individuals at rest in Eugene Pioneer Cemetery, will be available for purchase at the cemetery during Memorial Day Service on May 25th. Jane Lake, the author, will be on-site to sign your books!

Eugene Pioneer Cemetery

www.EugenePioneerCemetery.org

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